



# WELLNESS

magazine

SPRING 2026



WELLNESS brought to you by ESS

- HEALTHIER MIND
- HEALTHIER FOOD
- HEALTHIER BODY
- HEALTHIER WORLD

# WELCOME TO THE LATEST ISSUE OF OUR WELLNESS MAGAZINE!



Spring brings brighter days, warmer weather and a reawakening of wildlife. In this issue, we discuss how we can embrace the opportunities that nature's vibrancy presents at this time of year and focus on our wellbeing holistically.

Starting with food safety and security, we look at essentials that we can often take for granted but are of paramount importance as rates of allergies rise and the effects of food inflation continue to put more families under pressure across the UK.

Turning inwards, we explore tools that help you navigate an increasingly noisy world, from welcoming silence with calming meditation to stepping into nature for a walk and the benefits that can bring.

As we look after ourselves, we also aim to improve our understanding of others, including individuals with autism, how to support carers and our colleagues in the workplace.

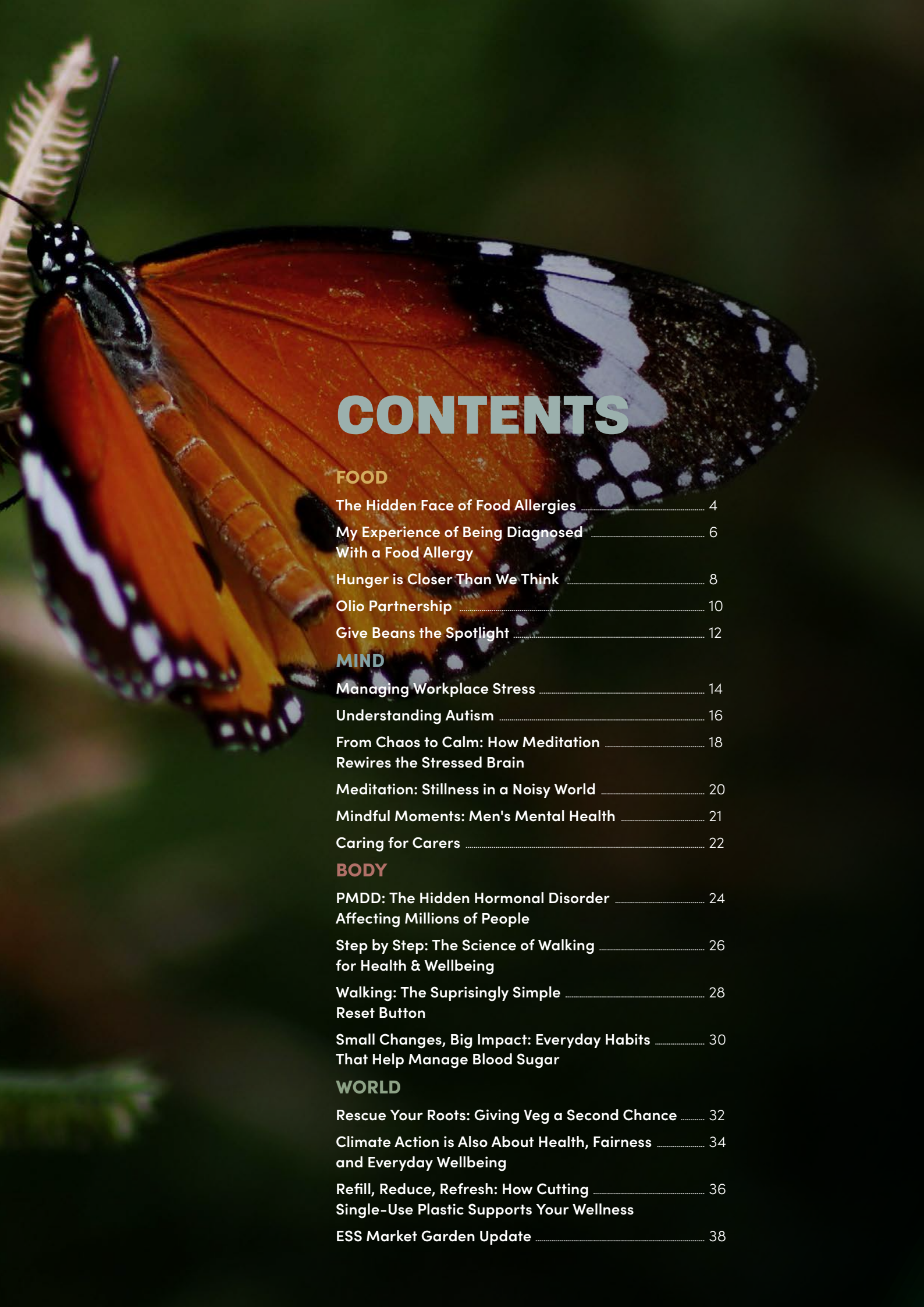
For our environment to support our wellbeing, we must repay the favour. We will share practical steps you can take to be more conscious of climate impact and waste.

In 2017, our parent company, Compass Group, launched the Stop Food Waste Day initiative, which takes place every April and has grown far beyond expectations. In support of this, we share tips on reducing food waste, an absolute no-brainer environmentally, financially and socially.

Let's use this spring to connect with nature, for the wellbeing of both people and the planet.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Bramwell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rees Bramwell  
Sustainability Director - Compass One



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# THE HIDDEN FACE OF FOOD ALLERGIES

## ADULTS LIVING WITH LATE DIAGNOSIS

NATIONAL FOOD ALLERGY AWARENESS WEEK: 11<sup>TH</sup>–17<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2026

Many people associate food allergies with childhood: nut-free classrooms, labelled lunchboxes and school precautions. Yet for many adults in the UK, food allergies begin later in life, often emerging without warning.



Around 6% of UK adults are estimated to have a clinically confirmed food allergy, with a significant proportion developing symptoms beyond childhood.<sup>1</sup>

Adult-onset food allergies often begin subtly. Mild oral tingling, itching of the lips or tongue, unexplained digestive discomfort, bloating, nausea or skin flare-ups can all be early warning signs. Because these symptoms are often mild or inconsistent at first, they are commonly dismissed as stress, ageing, hormonal changes or digestive sensitivity.

Research shows that while many adults report adverse reactions to food, far fewer seek clinical confirmation, meaning allergies may go unrecognised for long periods.<sup>1</sup>



Receiving an allergy diagnosis in adulthood can be emotionally challenging. Food is social, cultural and deeply personal, and suddenly needing to question what is 'safe' to eat can affect confidence and participation in everyday life. UK research shows that psychological distress, including anxiety and fear of food-related reactions, is common among adults with food allergies, yet support is often limited.<sup>2</sup>

This mental burden can affect enjoyment of food, social occasions and overall wellbeing, highlighting the importance of addressing emotional health alongside physical safety.

Self-diagnosis or unnecessary food avoidance can lead to nutritional gaps and increased anxiety. Clinical testing through appropriate NHS pathways helps distinguish true food allergy from intolerances or other gastrointestinal conditions, supporting safer and more balanced dietary choices.<sup>3</sup> Clear diagnosis provides reassurance, confidence and a practical framework for managing risk.

## Practical tips for safe eating

Living with a newly diagnosed allergy doesn't mean avoiding enjoyment, it means being informed and prepared:

- **Read labels every time**, even on familiar products, as recipes can change.
- **Ask questions when eating out.** Staff are used to allergen enquiries and should have clear allergen information.
- **Avoid unnecessary restriction.** Only exclude foods confirmed by clinical testing.
- **Plan ahead** for social occasions by checking menus in advance or bringing a safe alternative.
- **Carry prescribed medication** (e.g. antihistamines or adrenaline auto-injectors) where appropriate.
- **Keep a simple symptom diary** to help identify patterns and discuss concerns with healthcare professionals.

## Supporting mental wellbeing

Managing food allergies is not just physical; emotional wellbeing matters too:

- **Acknowledge anxiety as valid**, not an overreaction.
- **Communicate openly** with friends, family and colleagues about your needs.
- **Seek professional support** if fear of food or eating out begins to affect daily life.
- **Focus on what you can eat**, not just what you need to avoid.
- **Connect with support organisations** for trusted advice and reassurance.



Adult-onset allergies may be influenced by immune changes, gut health and environmental exposure. Factors such as stress, illness, antibiotics, pregnancy, urban living and pollution may alter immune responses and tolerance to foods. Oral allergy syndrome, for example, demonstrates how environmental pollen exposure can trigger reactions to certain fresh fruits in adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

Learning to live confidently with an allergy is a gradual process and support, both medical and emotional, plays a vital role. A late allergy diagnosis can feel overwhelming, but with accurate testing, clear guidance and practical coping strategies, it can be managed effectively. Adults can regain confidence around food and social eating. Recognising that food allergies can develop at any age helps normalise the experience and encourages early support, ensuring safety without sacrificing wellbeing.



1. Food Standards Agency (2023). Patterns and Prevalence of Adult Food Allergy (PAFA).

2. Aston University (2022). Psychological distress in adults living with food allergy.

3. NICE Quality Standard QS118: Food allergy.

# MY EXPERIENCE OF BEING DIAGNOSED WITH AN ALLERGY



**Jason Webb**, Head of Human Resources – ESS Defence, Marine and Aerospace

I'd always considered myself fortunate, never a fuss at restaurants, no awkward questions about ingredients and certainly no allergies.

So it came as a shock when, in my fifties, I found myself plunged into a world of caution and EpiPens, all thanks to a shellfish allergy I never saw coming.

It started at a local summer music festival. I was always a big shellfish lover, so I headed straight to the paella stand. The trouble began hours later. I woke in the night with a dreadful feeling. My stomach was churning, I felt feverish and my heart thudded in my chest.

At first, I put it down to a dodgy prawn or perhaps a little too much to drink. Once the symptoms started, they came on rapidly. I walked to the bathroom but collapsed before I got there. When I came around, my body was overheating and I was panting for breath like a dog on a hot summer day, sweat pouring off me. As it was around five hours after eating the paella, I was convinced it was a classic case of food poisoning. I brushed it off and forgot about it.

Six months later, I was out on a lunch with my family. I chose a dish that contained lots of mussels and whelks, all the stuff I now know I can't eat. One of my daughters had the same dish, so I took her shellfish as she didn't want to eat it.

This time, the reaction was more dramatic and far more frightening. About four hours after eating, I started to feel that same strange sensation and experienced the same symptoms as I had with the paella. This time, there was no denying something was seriously wrong. The delayed reaction threw us off. None of us immediately suspected an allergy because it wasn't the immediate swelling or throat-closing reaction you see on TV.

But experiencing it a second time, and with such ferocity, made me wonder if it really was food poisoning after all. I booked an appointment with my GP and explained the episodes in detail. It wasn't straightforward. At first the doctor I saw was unconvinced and basically said to just avoid shellfish.

I pressed for a referral; if nothing else, I needed peace of mind. I was booked in for tests: scratch testing on my arm, where tiny drops of shellfish extract were applied to pricked skin, and blood tests to check for specific antibodies. Watching the skin react where the shellfish drops landed was both alarming and oddly reassuring. The blood tests confirmed it. I had developed an allergy to crustaceans and molluscs.

The diagnosis came with a new accessory, a bright yellow EpiPen, and a crash course in how to use it, ensuring that my family also learned what to do if I ever collapsed again.

Suddenly, eating out became an exercise in vigilance. Even with all the improvements in allergen awareness at restaurants, such as clearer menus, allergy charts and servers trained to ask about allergies, I still found myself double-checking when servers neglected to ask.

If there's one thing I've learnt, it's never to assume you're too old for surprises. Adult-onset allergies are more common than you might think, but they're real and they change your life in ways both big and small. However, with vigilance and a little patience, you can minimise the risk and still enjoy eating out.



**Rachel Watts,**  
Contract Manager –  
ESS

In 2024, I developed a severe allergy to tree nuts. As a child, I never had any allergy concerns and never needed to avoid certain foods. The reactions began in early 2024, although at the time I didn't realise they were related to anything I was eating. Over time, I started developing hives all over my body, and with each reaction, the symptoms become worst.

While on holiday in Greece at the end of June 2024, I experienced a severe reaction. My lips, eyes and mouth became swollen and the hives covered my body so badly that my skin was red all over. At this point, I was still unaware of the cause.

A doctor was called and I was given an adrenaline injection, prescribed medication and advised to avoid tomatoes and paprika. At the time this seemed random, as no one knew what caused the reaction. It was an extremely scary moment and sent me into panic. I recovered 48 hours later.

After returning to the UK, I became unwell within 24 hours and underwent various tests. A week and a half later, I was out attending an appointment. As I hadn't eaten, I grabbed an almond croissant for convenience. Within five minutes of eating it, I started to feel unwell. Hives appeared across my body, but the worst-affected areas

were around my neck and on the scalp of my head, causing large bumps that were so itchy.

15 minutes later, my face began to itch and swell. I told my partner that if he just takes me home, I would take some antihistamines and go to bed, not realising the severity of what was happening. He ignored this and drove me straight to minor unit at a nearby hospital. By this point, I was upset, distressed and feeling increasingly anxious and worried as my symptoms were getting worse.

The nurses took me straight in and gave me an antihistamine, hoping it would ease my symptoms. Unfortunately, my condition quickly became more severe. My eyes swelled so much that I could barely see, and my throat began to swell, making it difficult to breath as I gasped for each breath.

An adrenaline injection was administered immediately and an ambulance was called to take me to the main hospital. Ten minutes later, I was in the back of the ambulance, given another adrenaline injection and blue lighted to Royal United Hospital in Bath.

The next 12 hours were crucial. Further tests were carried out and I was given additional antihistamines while being constantly monitored. Blood tests later confirmed that I had experienced a full anaphylactic shock. I was referred to an allergy consultant at Southmead Hospital in Bristol and was provided with EpiPens.

After further tests, it was confirmed I had developed a tree nut allergy and an NSAID allergy (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), with Ibuprofen being one of the most common triggers. This was hard to understand and get my head around, and I had to adjust to being more mindful of what I could and I couldn't eat.

My partner and children were very supportive, but the reality of the situation hit when I needed to show my eight-year-old how to use an EpiPen in case I was ever too unwell to administer it myself during another anaphylactic reaction. The emotional impact of this was very difficult at the time. At first, I became anxious about eating out as I struggled with the uncertainty. I would check every product I bought at the supermarket, as one brand might not contain nuts while another one would.

Had I not gone to the hospital that day and stayed home thinking I would be fine, there is a high chance I may not have survived. That is a frightening thought, but it is the reality of living with a severe allergy.

I shared my experience with my team on site, and they all know where my EpiPens are located. Allergies and allergens are now something we talk about regularly.

# HUNGER IS CLOSER THAN WE THINK

## WHY FOOD INSECURITY IS A UK WELLBEING ISSUE

When we think of hunger, we often imagine distant countries facing famine or disaster.

But the truth is, hunger is not just a global problem. It's happening here in the UK and it's growing. Food insecurity is no longer a hidden issue; it's a wellbeing crisis affecting millions of households across our communities.

The UK is often seen as a wealthy nation where everyone has access to basic needs. Yet rising living costs, stagnant wages and economic uncertainty have shattered that perception. According to recent data, 14.1 million people in the UK experienced food insecurity in 2024, which is around one in six households.<sup>1</sup>

Food bank usage has surged to record levels, with 2.9 million emergency food parcels distributed in 2024–25, a 51% increase over the past five years.<sup>2</sup> That's one parcel every eleven seconds.

2.9 million emergency food parcels were distributed in 2024–25, a 51% increase over the past five years.<sup>5</sup>



Food insecurity isn't just skipping a meal; it's the constant stress of wondering where your next meal will come from or having to choose between heating your home and feeding your family. For many, this means relying on cheap, processed foods that lack essential nutrients and can have serious consequences for health and wellbeing.

Poor nutrition doesn't just affect the waistline; it impacts every system in the body. Nutrient deficiencies can lead to fatigue, weakened immunity and developmental issues in children. Consuming a diet dominated by processed foods increases the risk of developing obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Malnutrition costs the NHS around £19.6 billion per year, with obesity adding another £6.5 billion.<sup>3</sup>

Food insecurity weighs heavily on the mind. Constant worry about food creates chronic stress, and feelings of shame and helplessness often lead to depression. In June 2024, 28% of people with mental health conditions lived in food-insecure households, compared to 10.7% of those without.<sup>4</sup> Research shows that food insecurity can trigger anxiety and depression within weeks, and the effects can reverse just as quickly when food security is restored.





### What can we do?

- **Raise awareness:** Combat the myth that hunger is only a global issue.
- **Support access:** Connect people with food banks, community kitchens and school meal programmes.
- **Give:** Put an extra can of beans or jar of pasta sauce in your shopping basket and donate to a food bank.
- **Plan:** Prevent food waste by writing a shopping list and only purchasing what you need.

Everyone has a role to play in tackling food insecurity. Small steps at home, in our communities and in advocacy can make a real difference. Together, we can ensure that fewer households go hungry, protect wellbeing and build a stronger, more resilient UK.

Children are among the hardest hit. One in seven households with children experience food insecurity.<sup>5</sup> Disabled adults, single-parent families, low-income households and those relying on Universal Credit face significantly higher risks.



1: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yqw5d00r0o](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yqw5d00r0o)

2: [www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/latest-stats/end-of-year-stats](http://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/latest-stats/end-of-year-stats)

3: [www.uhs.nhs.uk/ClinicalResearchinSouthampton/Research/Facilities/NIHR-Southampton-Biomedical-Research-Centre/Ourresearchandimpacts/Impactcasestudies/ThecostofmalnutritionintheUKeconomicreport.aspx](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/ClinicalResearchinSouthampton/Research/Facilities/NIHR-Southampton-Biomedical-Research-Centre/Ourresearchandimpacts/Impactcasestudies/ThecostofmalnutritionintheUKeconomicreport.aspx)

4: [foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/people-mental-health-condition-more-likely-be-living-food-insecure-households](http://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/people-mental-health-condition-more-likely-be-living-food-insecure-households)

5: [foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-data-shows-one-seven-households-children-struggling-afford-food](http://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-data-shows-one-seven-households-children-struggling-afford-food)



# OLIO

## TWO MUMS ON A MISSION TO PUT A STOP TO FOOD WASTE

Olio is a sharing app for local communities, making it easy to give away the things you don't need to someone who will value them.



**Cozzi Baring,**  
Head of B2B Marketing  
- Olio

Founded in 2015 by Tessa Clarke and Saasha Celestial-One, Olio started as an app to combat food waste. Today, it helps nine million users worldwide reduce all kinds of waste, connect communities and save money in the process.

We hear from the self-described 'mums on a mission' about the problem they set out to solve and what they've achieved in the ten years since launching Olio.



**Tessa Clarke,**  
Co-founder and CEO

*"I saw first-hand how much effort goes into producing our food."*

**Tessa:** "Growing up on a dairy farm in Yorkshire, there was always work to be done. Feeding cows, mucking out stalls, moving stock late into the evening, 365 days a year. That's the level of graft it takes to produce the food we eat. And that's why I believe so strongly that food should be eaten, not thrown away."

She recalls the moment that changed everything:

*"The removal men were stood there with a bin liner, but I couldn't do it."*

"I had a lightbulb moment when moving house. We'd tried to get through everything in the fridge, but we still had six sweet potatoes, a whole white cabbage and a few pots of yoghurt. I set off knocking on doors around the neighbourhood, newborn and toddler in tow, thinking this is crazy. There must be an easier way to share surplus food."

"And so the concept for Olio was born. When I told Saasha a few months later, her eyes lit up. We knew we had to make it happen. We had to do something about the fact that a third of food produced globally is wasted and half of that happens in the home."



**Saasha Celestial-One,**  
Co-founder and COO

*"I learned early on that one person's trash is truly another's treasure."*

**Saasha:** "I'm the daughter of Iowa hippy entrepreneurs, hence the unusual last name. We were a big, relatively poor family, and I spent much of my childhood following my mum around on salvage missions. We rescued what others had discarded: wood from abandoned houses, plants left in dumpsters, aluminium soda cans (worth 5¢ a pop!). Waste wasn't an option."

"I'm passionate about the food industry. As a teenager, I launched dozens of my own little businesses, and I always dreamed of becoming a real entrepreneur. When Tessa told me about her genius idea for a food sharing app, I instantly knew I wanted to be a part of it. It took us an hour to choose the name and make our plan. We dream big and move fast at Olio."

ESS has partnered with Olio since 2023 to redistribute good-to-eat surplus food to our local communities.

We recently passed a milestone 50 tonnes of food donated.

## From a WhatsApp group to a global movement fighting waste

For the prototype, Tessa and Saasha started small. 12 people from a single neighbourhood were put in a WhatsApp chat and invited to offer out any food that would otherwise have gone unused.

At first, nothing happened.

Then suddenly, someone posted half a bag of shallots. Those shallots became a catalyst for a flurry of posts. It seemed that once people started sharing, they just couldn't stop.

In the feedback group two weeks later, the response was unanimous: *"You have to build this app."*

Today, millions of people use Olio not just to share food, but anything around the house that isn't being used. It's not just households who can benefit, businesses can play a part, too.

In the UK, Olio has a network of over 100,000 food-safety trained volunteers, who rescue surplus food from 8,500 locations each month: supermarkets to schools, offices, stadiums, hospitals, train stations and more. Each year, around 30 million meals are shared with local communities through the app.

Olio represents the belief that we all have the power to do something small, to bring about meaningful change for our communities and the planet. That's why Olio isn't just an app fighting waste. It's a movement for optimism.

And it all began with one mum's refusal to throw away a cabbage, some yoghurt and a bunch of sweet potatoes.

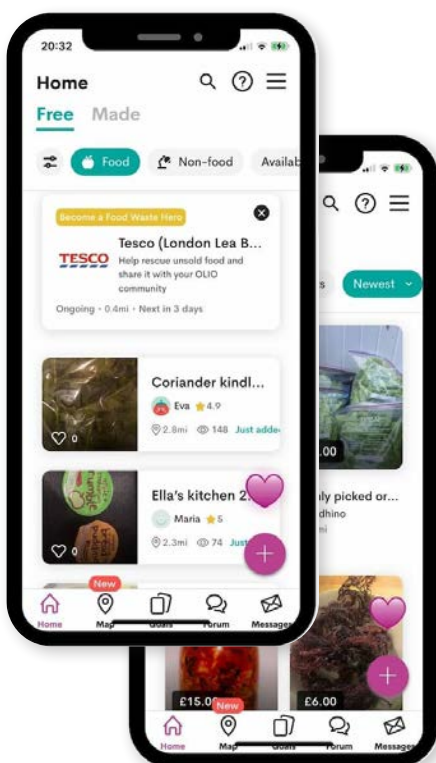
9 million users and 8,500 locations are building less wasteful communities with Olio.



**olio**

**Get your community sharing with Olio**

Download Olio from the App Store or Google Play and start a sharing revolution with your community.



# GIVE BEANS THE SPOTLIGHT

VEGETARIAN WEEK: 19<sup>TH</sup>–25<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2026

BNF HEALTHY EATING WEEK: 9<sup>TH</sup>–13<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026

## When was the last time you gave beans a second thought?

Most UK adults aren't hitting the recommended 30 grams of fibre a day.<sup>4</sup> That shortfall can lead to sluggish digestion, poor gut health and even increased risk of chronic disease. Beans are one of the easiest ways to close that gap. For most of us in the UK, they're either the humble baked beans on toast or something lurking in a chilli. But behind their modest appearance, beans are nutritional powerhouses that can support your wellbeing, from your digestion to your mental health.

Ever noticed how your mood dips after a sugary snack? Quick-release carbohydrates send your blood sugar soaring, only to crash later. Beans, on the other hand, are low on the glycaemic index, releasing energy slowly and steadily. This helps keep your blood sugar and mood on an even keel. Beans are rich in B vitamins and magnesium, essential for brain health.

Your gut and brain are in constant conversation through what scientists call the gut-brain axis, and fibre plays a key role. Beans contain tryptophan, an amino acid your body uses to make serotonin. This neurotransmitter

**Just half a tin of baked beans gives you around 7 grams of fibre. That's almost a quarter of your daily target.<sup>5</sup>**



Plus, beans are bursting with fibre, which feeds the good bacteria in your gut. These bacteria produce short-chain fatty acids that reduce inflammation and influence neurotransmitters linked to mood and cognition. UK research is increasingly showing that a healthy gut microbiome can help reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. One study found that two specific types of gut bacteria were consistently lacking in the microbiomes of people with depression.<sup>2</sup>

Beans provide a perfect balance of slow-release carbohydrates and plant-based protein, keeping you fuller for longer and avoiding those mid-afternoon slumps. They're also rich in iron and magnesium, which help fight fatigue. For anyone juggling work, family and fitness, beans are a simple way to keep your energy steady throughout the day.

If you're thinking "beans are boring," think again. They're incredibly versatile. Toss chickpeas into a salad, stir kidney beans into a chilli or try a bean-based curry for dinner. Even baked beans on toast count, but try and pick the no added sugar or salt options!

Using beans in cooking can also help to bring down the cost. Beans cost on average 4.45 times less per 100 g than other plant-based meat alternatives.<sup>6</sup> Tins of beans are available at most supermarkets from 20p and can also help stretch out more expensive ingredients.

**The average fibre intake in the UK is 18g a day.<sup>3</sup>**



# SMOKED BLACK BEAN TACOS



Why not pick up a tin or two on your next weekly shop and enjoy the variety they can add to your meals?

Beans are good for your brain, your gut and your energy levels. They're affordable, sustainable and packed with nutrients that support both physical and mental wellbeing. So next time you're planning a meal, give beans the spotlight. Your body (and your mood) will thank you.

## Five easy pulse-based recipes for Healthy Eating Week:

- **Monday:** Add beans to breakfast.
- **Tuesday:** Include soya beans in your salad.
- **Wednesday:** Try dahl for dinner.
- **Thursday:** Chuck chickpeas in to a curry.
- **Friday:** Marcus' smoked black bean tacos (recipe opposite).



**Marcus Jefford** - Head Chef, ESS

Vegan Bean Tacos, Lightly Spiced with Cumin and Smoked Paprika, Topped with Fresh Guacamole and a Pomegranate Salsa.

Serves 4

### Ingredients:

#### Bean Chili:

- 1 small white onion
- 3 400g tins of black beans
- 3 garlic cloves
- 3 tbsp vinegar (any type)
- 2 tbsp smoked paprika
- 2 tbsp cumin
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil

#### Guacamole:

- 1 small garlic clove
- 2 tbsp chopped coriander
- 1 sliced green chilli
- 2 avocados
- 1 lime

#### Salsa:

- 100g pomegranate seeds
- 1 diced green chilli
- 1 small onion (red if possible)
- Handful of chopped coriander
- 50g corn

#### To finish:

- 12 small corn tortillas
- Coconut yogurt
- Salt
- Lime wedges
- Hot sauce

### Method:

- 1** In a large frying pan, heat the oil and add the garlic and onion. Fry until golden, then add the beans. Pour in the cider vinegar and spices along with 1 tsp of salt, to taste. Cook until warmed through, gently crushing with the back of your wooden spoon, then set aside.
- 2** To make the guacamole, the best tool is a large stone pestle and mortar, but a medium bowl and a flat-ended rolling pin works too. Crush the garlic, coriander and chilli into a rough paste. Scoop in the avocado with a little salt and crush roughly, keeping it chunky rather than smooth. Squeeze in the lime juice and set aside.
- 3** Mix the salsa ingredients in a small bowl. Heat a griddle pan or steamer and quickly griddle or steam the tortillas to warm them. Reheat the bean mixture.
- 4** To serve, put 1-2 heaped tbsp of beans on a tortilla. Top with a big spoonful of guacamole, some salsa, a dash of hot sauce and a dollop of yogurt.

1: The Science of Nutrition by Rhiannon Lambert

2: <https://www.science.org/content/article/evidence-mounts-gut-bacteria-can-influence-mood-prevent-depression>

3: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/fibre.html>

4: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/digestive-health/how-to-get-more-fibre-into-your-diet/>

5: McCance and Widdowson, 2021

6: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-bean-facts-report-links-low-bean-intake-9000-premature-deaths>

# MANAGING WORKPLACE STRESS

## SIMPLE WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR WELLBEING

STRESS AWARENESS MONTH: APRIL 2026

Stress is something we all face and at times it can feel like fighting an uphill battle.



**Isabelle Whiten,**  
Nutrition Student  
- University of  
Birmingham

The way we respond to stress plays an important role in our overall wellbeing. Understanding what stress is and recognising how it affects us is the first step towards managing it effectively.<sup>1</sup>

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain caused by challenging or difficult situations. It is a natural and universal human experience designed to help us deal with pressure or perceived threats.<sup>2</sup> In small amounts, stress can be useful, as it can improve focus, help us meet deadlines and encourage us to take action. However, when stress feels overwhelming or out of control, it can take a toll on our mood, physical health and relationships. People may notice increased anxiety, irritability or low self-confidence.<sup>1</sup>

Most people experience stress at some point, particularly during periods of change or uncertainty.<sup>1</sup> For many people, work is one of the most common sources of stress.<sup>1,3</sup>

### Workplace stress

Workplace stress doesn't just affect your mood, it can influence your energy, focus and even your physical health. The Health and Safety Executive reports that stress, depression and anxiety account for a significant proportion of work-related ill health in the UK, with tight deadlines, high workloads and lack of control among the most common triggers.<sup>3</sup>

**In 2023/24, around 776,000 UK workers reported work-related stress, depression or anxiety, making up almost half of all self-reported work-related ill health.<sup>4</sup>**



While some stress is a natural part of working life, prolonged or unmanaged stress can be harmful. It may lead to fatigue, irritability, reduced productivity and difficulties with concentration.<sup>1</sup> Feeling constantly under pressure can also affect how you interact with colleagues and your overall job satisfaction.<sup>1,3</sup>

### Effects of prolonged and chronic stress

Lots of people see their stress levels naturally reduce over time, but for others, stress can last longer. Long periods of stress can significantly impact both mental and physical wellbeing.<sup>2</sup> When stress occurs, the body releases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which help us respond quickly to pressure. However, prolonged exposure to these hormones can affect mood, increasing feelings of irritability, low mood or anxiety.<sup>1,3</sup> When stress continues over a long period, it can become chronic, affecting both mental and physical health.

Chronic stress may interfere with concentration and decision-making and can lead to changes in appetite or digestion. While short-term stress can help us meet deadlines or stay focused, sustained stress keeps the body in a heightened state of alert, which can negatively affect long-term health.<sup>1,3</sup> Over time, chronic stress can have serious effects on the body. It may contribute to high blood pressure, encourage the buildup of deposits in the arteries, and even lead to changes in the brain that increase the risk of anxiety, depression and addictive behaviours.<sup>5</sup>

## Managing stress during the workday

Small actions during the day can make a real difference, and you may even be able to do some on your break. Some simple strategies include:

- **Step away from your desk:** Taking a short walk during your break or stepping away from your workspace for a few minutes can refresh your mind and improve concentration.<sup>1</sup>
- **Move your body:** Stretching, light exercise or using the stairs increases blood flow and can reduce tension.<sup>1</sup>
- **Change your environment:** If possible, switching tasks or taking a short break from a difficult task can help reset your focus and reduce feelings of overwhelm.<sup>1</sup>
- **Talk with colleagues:** Talk briefly with a trusted colleague during your break to share immediate concerns.<sup>2</sup>
- **Practise deep breathing or mindfulness:** Even a few minutes focusing on your breath or a mindfulness exercise can lower stress and calm the nervous system.<sup>1</sup>
- **Positive thinking:** List three things you are thankful for each day. They can be big or small.<sup>1</sup>

Incorporating these simple steps into your workday doesn't take much time but can significantly improve wellbeing and productivity.<sup>1,2</sup>

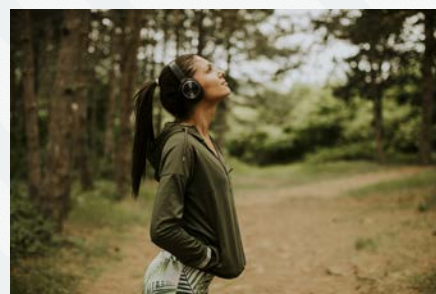
## Supporting stress management outside work

Managing stress isn't just about what you do during the workday. How you take care of yourself outside work is equally important. Engaging in regular activities you enjoy and building supportive relationships can help reduce stress and improve resilience.<sup>2</sup>

Some practical strategies include:

- **Exercise regularly:** Physical activity helps your body process stress hormones and can boost mood. Even short walks, yoga sessions or a run can make a noticeable difference.<sup>2</sup>
- **Make time for hobbies:** Spending time on interests outside work, like painting, reading, gardening or listening to music, can provide a mental break and improve wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>
- **Maintain a support network:** Friends, family or community groups provide social support, a space to talk and opportunities to gain perspective on stressful situations.<sup>2</sup>

By incorporating these approaches into your routine, you strengthen your ability to manage stress, enhance mental wellbeing and support your overall health.<sup>2</sup>



Stress is a natural part of life, but prolonged or unmanaged stress can affect both mental and physical wellbeing. Taking steps to recognise stressors, manage pressure during the workday, and support yourself outside of work can help reduce these effects and improve overall health.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Why not reflect on your own stress levels, particularly at work, and take small, practical actions to protect your wellbeing? Whether it's taking regular breaks, engaging in physical activity, enjoying hobbies or maintaining supportive relationships, these strategies can make a meaningful difference in how you experience and manage stress.<sup>2</sup> Small changes can have a big impact.

1. NHS Every Mind Matters. Stress <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/stress/>

2. World Health Organization – Stress: Questions and Answers <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress>

3. Health and Safety Executive – Work-related stress <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>

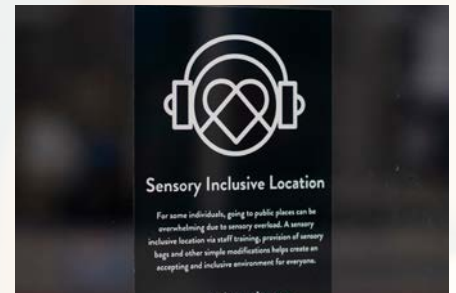
4. Health and Safety Executive press release – Work-related stress stats 2023/24 <https://press.hse.gov.uk/2025/11/03/stress-awareness-week-2025-time-to-act-on-work-related-stress/>

5. Harvard Health Publishing – Understanding the stress response <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response>

# UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

## BUILDING AWARENESS AND CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS

Autism affects more than one in 100 people in the UK<sup>1</sup>, yet many aspects of it are misunderstood.



**Isabelle Whiten,**  
Nutrition Student  
- University of  
Birmingham

Increasing awareness and understanding of autism can help foster empathy, support and inclusivity.

**Understanding autism means recognising that it is a spectrum and everyone experiences it differently.<sup>2</sup>**



### What is autism?

Our understanding of autism is constantly developing.<sup>1</sup> As more research is carried out and more people are diagnosed as autistic, global awareness increases and new insights into autism emerge.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the medical name for autism, is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition that affects how people interact with others and experience the world.<sup>1</sup> It is a spectrum, which means that different people experience it in different ways, and visible characteristics can vary a lot between individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the characteristics and behaviours often associated with ASD are:

- Difficulty communicating and interacting with others.
- Challenges understanding the thoughts and feelings of others.
- Sensory processing difficulties, such as finding bright lights or loud noises overwhelming.
- Struggling socially or feeling anxious in unfamiliar situations.
- A strong reliance on routines.<sup>1</sup>

Each autistic individual has a unique combination of traits, making every experience of autism highly personal.<sup>1</sup>

### Different experiences

Although autism is associated with certain characteristics, it is not a simple checklist. Autistic people may experience some of these traits, many of them or different combinations. This is because autism is a spectrum, and each person's experience is unique, making autism highly diverse.<sup>1,2</sup>

Some autistic people may live independently and require little support, while others may need regular or ongoing care in their daily lives. Differences can also appear in communication styles, sensory sensitivities, routines, and the way individuals interact with the world around them.<sup>1</sup> Support needs can also change over time, and a person's strengths and challenges may vary depending on the environment, tasks and stage of life.

### Strengths

Did you know that autistic people can have some specific strengths and abilities that go beyond those generally experienced by neurotypical individuals? Many autistic people demonstrate exceptional focus, deep knowledge in areas of interest, strong attention to detail and original problem-solving skills, which can lead to creative insights and innovations. Autistic individuals often think in honest, logical and direct ways, bringing clarity and integrity to communication and decision-making. Strengths such as pattern recognition, visual thinking, memory and persistence can be particularly valuable in fields like science, technology, the arts and research.<sup>3</sup>

Just as importantly, many autistic people show deep empathy, loyalty and a strong sense of justice, offering unique perspectives that contribute to a more inclusive, thoughtful and balanced society. Although not every autistic person will have all these strengths, research has shown these traits can be common.



## Misconceptions

Autism is increasingly recognised today, but it is still often misunderstood. Many myths about autism continue to circulate, which can make it harder for autistic people to access understanding and support.<sup>4,5</sup>

A common misconception is that autism is caused by factors such as parenting, diet or vaccines. Research shows that autism is a neurodevelopmental condition, and these beliefs are not supported by evidence.<sup>4</sup>

Another myth is that autism can be 'cured.' Autism is a lifelong condition, and while support can help individuals manage challenges and thrive, there is no cure.<sup>4,5</sup>

There are also misunderstandings about how autism affects people socially. Some people believe that autistic individuals lack empathy or are not interested in social interaction. However, many autistic people do experience empathy and form meaningful relationships, though they may express and communicate it in different ways.<sup>5</sup>

It is also often assumed that autism only affects children. However, autism is lifelong and many adults are autistic, with some receiving a diagnosis later in life as awareness continues to grow.<sup>5</sup>

Challenging these misconceptions is an important step towards improving understanding, reducing stigma and creating more inclusive environments for autistic people.<sup>4,5</sup>



## Masking

Autistic masking refers to the conscious or unconscious process by which autistic people hide or suppress their natural traits in order to fit in with social expectations. Sometimes called social camouflaging, it can include forcing eye contact, copying other people's social behaviours, rehearsing conversations or hiding stimming behaviours.

Masking is often used to avoid bullying, discrimination or misunderstanding, and many autistic people begin doing it from a young age. While masking can help someone navigate work or social situations, it can be mentally and emotionally exhausting. Prolonged masking is linked to stress, anxiety, burnout and difficulties with identity and self-esteem.<sup>6</sup>

Increasing awareness and acceptance of autism can help reduce the pressure on autistic people to mask and allow them to be themselves more safely. Encouraging understanding and inclusion helps create a society where everyone can participate without feeling the need to hide who they are.



## Why awareness matters

Misconceptions about autism can lead to stigma or make it harder for autistic people to access the support and understanding they need.

Autism is just one part of a person's story, but it does not tell the whole story. By raising awareness and embracing acceptance, we can challenge misconceptions and create communities where everyone feels understood and supported.

This highlights the importance of celebrating neurodiversity, learning more about the experiences of autistic people, and championing kindness and understanding every day.

1. <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism>  
2. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/autism/what-is-autism/>

3. <https://embrace-autism.com/autism-strengths-and-challenges/>  
4. <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/brain-nerves-and-spinal-cord/autism/myths-about-autism/>

5. <https://differentminds.scot/fact-v-fiction/>

6. <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/behaviour/masking>

# FROM CHAOS TO CALM: HOW MEDITATION REWIRES THE STRESSED BRAIN

STRESS AWARENESS MONTH: APRIL 2026  
WORLD MEDITATION DAY: 21<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2026

*If you've ever tried meditation and thought, 'I'm rubbish at this, my brain won't switch off,' you're not alone.*

One of the biggest myths about meditation is that it's only for the serene, spiritual or highly disciplined. In reality, meditation is for busy, everyday minds, and recent research shows it can reduce stress, improve attention, strengthen emotional regulation and physically rewire the brain.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

For example, a 2025 study found that even brief meditation alters activity in deep brain regions involved in emotion regulation and memory, including the *amygdala* and *hippocampus*. This suggests a direct link between meditation and how the brain processes stress and emotion.<sup>3</sup> Other research on mindfulness programmes has reported increased functional connectivity in networks that support attention and self-control, alongside changes in brain activity patterns that distinguish meditative states from everyday mind-wandering.<sup>4</sup>

Many people assume meditation means clearing the mind completely. Neuroscience shows the mind naturally wanders, and meditation is simply the practice of noticing when it does and gently bringing attention back.

With repeated practice, this process strengthens attention pathways, emotion regulation circuits and cognitive control networks. This is an example of neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to reorganise itself based on experience.<sup>5</sup>

Meditation isn't about switching off. It's about training attention and emotion regulation, strengthening the brain's capacity to handle stress while reducing cortisol over time.<sup>6,7</sup>

## Practical tips for busy minds:

- **Ground yourself:** Notice your feet on the floor or the weight of your body in a chair.
- **Start small:** Even one or two minutes can begin to shift how your mind settles.<sup>8</sup>
- **Label thoughts:** Quietly note them as planning, worrying or remembering to reduce their emotional pull.<sup>9</sup>
- **Drop the judgment:** Getting distracted is part of the practice, not failure.

Meditation is a tool for emotional resilience and inner strength. Research shows that regular mindfulness practice improves self-awareness, emotion regulation and adaptive stress responses, allowing you to respond rather than react under pressure.<sup>4,10</sup>

These benefits are linked to neuroplastic changes in the prefrontal and limbic brain regions that govern attention and self-control. Over time, these adaptations foster calm confidence, not bravado, but a stable inner sense of competence.

1. Zainal, N.H., & Newman, M.G. (2025). Mindfulness enhances cognitive functioning: a meta-analysis of recent RCTs. *Health Psychology Review*, 18(2), 369–395.

2. PubMed (2024). Mindfulness training reduces cortisol and improves emotional regulation. ([pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov))

3. ScienceDaily (2025). Meditation alters amygdala and hippocampal activity linked to emotional regulation. ([sciencedaily.com](https://sciencedaily.com))

4. MDPI (2024). Neurobiological changes induced by mindfulness meditation. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 12(11), 2613. ([mdpi.com](https://mdpi.com))

5. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* (2024). Meditation strengthens attention and cognitive control networks. 18:1482353. ([frontiersin.org](https://frontiersin.org))

6. PubMed (2025). Meditation reduces stress physiology in working adults. ([pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov))

7. MDPI (2025). Mindfulness lowers cortisol and supports neuroplasticity in high-stress adults. ([mdpi.com](https://mdpi.com))

## Tips for restful sleep

Racing thoughts are one of the biggest barriers to restful sleep, but meditation can help by reducing cognitive hyperactivity, lowering stress hormones and activating parasympathetic relaxation pathways.<sup>12,13</sup>

Simple, practical techniques can be particularly effective:

- **Breath counting:** Slowly count from one to ten and repeat to help focus the mind.
- **Body scan:** Move attention slowly through the body, noticing sensations without judgment, to promote relaxation.
- **Thought parking:** Write down worries before bed and mentally 'park' them until morning to ease rumination.

Even short, consistent sessions can train the brain to wind down more efficiently, creating optimal conditions for restorative sleep.

## Enhancing your mental fitness

Meditation is increasingly recognised as a form of mental fitness, with research showing that long-term practice enhances attention, working memory, cognitive flexibility and emotional regulation through neuroplastic adaptations.<sup>9,14</sup>

In many ways, meditation acts like strength training for the mind. Focusing attention strengthens mental stamina, noticing distractions improves awareness, and returning focus builds resilience. Over time, these neurocognitive benefits translate into everyday advantages, including better focus, calmer decision-making and more effective problem-solving, allowing the brain to operate more efficiently in both professional and personal contexts.

Meditation isn't about becoming someone else. It's about working with the brain you already have, busy, curious, distracted and human. Whether your goal is calm, confidence, better sleep or sharper focus, even small, consistent practice can reorganise the brain. It reduces stress, enhances attention and improves emotional regulation.

Start where you are. Keep it simple, and remember: it's the return to focus that counts, not the absence of thought.

8. MDPI (2024). Short daily meditation enhances attention and well-being in adults. (mdpi.com)

9. PubMed (2024). Mindful labeling reduces cognitive and emotional reactivity. (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

10. Frontiers in Aging (2025). Mindfulness improves emotional resilience in older adults. (frontiersin.org)

11. MDPI (2024). Mindfulness enhances emotion regulation and stress management. (mdpi.com)

12. PubMed (2025). Meditation improves sleep quality and lowers hyperarousal. (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

13. MDPI (2024). Parasympathetic activation through meditation supports restorative sleep. (mdpi.com)

14. Neuroscience of Consciousness (2025). Long-term mindfulness alters brain functional networks supporting attention and cognition. (academic.oup.com)

# MEDITATION

## STILLNESS IN A NOISY WORLD

Life is busy. There just aren't enough hours in the day.



**Stephanie Wright,**  
Sales & Promotions  
Manager - ESS

With such busy lives in the modern world, how can you find time for a moment of stillness, let alone meditation?

- **Alarm goes off**, getting you up, getting the rest of the house ready...
- Breakfast, **traffic to work**, Teams calls, meetings, grabbing lunch...
- **School run**, after-school clubs, cooking dinner, **household chores**...
- A bit of **scrolling or TV**... *finally*, your head hits the pillow.

In this article, I aim to bust the myth that meditation is only for monks or yogis.

### What is meditation?

Meditation is a practical exercise that trains your attention to be more present. I've incorporated regular meditation into my life for some time, and I like to think of meditation as pressing a mental 'pause' button on the daily overload of modern life.

Our minds are like our own personal digital platforms, but unlike 'the cloud,' we do not have infinite storage. Without a pause, our circuits can easily overload.

Meditation gives us a way to process our thoughts, emotions and actions of the day, acknowledging what went well and what didn't, and allowing us to move forward with clarity.

This stillness is accessible to anyone, anywhere, and it is simpler than many people expect.

### Benefits behind the stillness

So why meditate? Why bother to find even a small portion of stillness?

Taking time for stillness has some key benefits for the mind and body, such as:

- Reducing stress and anxiety, helping you feel more relaxed.
- Improving focus, mental clarity and emotional balance.
- Supporting lower blood pressure and improved sleep.

### Where can you meditate in everyday life?

Meditation doesn't have to last for hours. You can start by taking a few minutes a few times a week and gradually build up to daily moments.

Here are a few tips to help get you started:

- **Switch off and move away from digital devices:** laptop, phone, TV, smartwatch.
- **Find the right environment for stillness:**
  - Not too hot or too cold.
  - Quiet or silent, with minimal distractions.
  - Natural daylight, low lighting or curtains drawn, whatever helps you relax.
- **Choose a comfortable position:** seated or lying down, whichever feels right.

It's really about finding what works for you. You can meditate virtually anywhere:

- **At home or work** in a tech-free area, sitting in a chair or on a cushion.
- **In a park or garden**, surrounded by nature, on a bench or on the ground.
- **In transit**, such as in a parked car or on a train.

Simply ground your feet, place your hands on your lap, knees or rib cage. Close your eyes and breathe in and out gently and steadily for 2-5 minutes. Your breathing does not have to be audible, just follow your natural rhythm. Make meditation feel natural and practical, part of your routine, not something precious or compulsory.

### Common barriers and how to get past them

It's normal to think: "I don't have time", "I have enough to think about!" or "Am I doing it right?" when you first try meditation.

You might feel a little awkward, especially since it is out of most of our comfort zones, but remember this is for you.

No one needs to see you taking a few moments to breathe. Short sessions count, and there is no such thing as a 'perfect' meditation.

Even just a few minutes a day can make a difference. In fact, the busier your mind or life, the more important it is to find a few minutes of stillness.

### Meditation is an invitation

Think of meditation as an experiment, not a lifestyle overhaul. Stillness is always available when you need it, so treat it as a simple invitation: one breath, one minute, one day at a time.

For me, meditation isn't about escaping life. It is about connecting more clearly to life and simply 'taking a breath.'

# MINDFUL MOMENTS

HEALTHIER MIND

## MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

MEN'S HEALTH MONTH: JUNE 2026  
MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK: 11<sup>TH</sup>-17<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2026

### INTRODUCTION

The Mental Health Foundation reports that around one in eight men in England has a mental health problem such as depression or anxiety.

However, it is difficult to know if these figures truly represent the reality. These figures only tell us about what has been reported, and unfortunately many cases go undiagnosed. This is potentially due to the social stigma men face around expressing their emotions, which can discourage men from seeking support.



### WHY DON'T MEN TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

Societal expectations and traditional gender roles likely play a significant part in why men are less likely to talk about their feelings or seek help for mental health problems.

From a young age, men are often encouraged to hide their emotions, with messages such as 'boys don't cry' seeming perfectly normal to so many of us. Worryingly, many of us will also have men in our lives that can't recall the last time they cried or asked for help.

Men are often expected to be strong and in control at all times, which can make it more difficult for them to open-up and reach out for help.

These social pressures can mean that many men go through their lives never really paying attention to or talking about their feelings. Research suggests that this lack of emotional literacy may mean that men are less able to recognise symptoms of mental health problems within themselves.

### WHY WE NEED TO START TALKING

- In the UK, men account for around 75% of suicide deaths.
- Men aged 40-49 have the highest suicide rates.
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for men under 45.
- Suicide kills three times more people than road traffic accidents.

### SUPPORT AVAILABLE:

- Head to the **Samaritans** for mental health support via call, text & email [www.samaritans.org/](http://www.samaritans.org/)
- Join an online community for peer support such as **Clic** or **Side by Side** [mentalhealth-uk.org/partnerships/projects/clic/](http://mentalhealth-uk.org/partnerships/projects/clic/) [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/side-by-side-our-online-community/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/side-by-side-our-online-community/)
- **Employee Assistance Programme.** Qualified consultants provide impartial support on all matters including financial wellbeing
- For more on Men's Mental Health, check out the Mental Health Foundation [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/mens-mental-health](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/mens-mental-health)

### TIPS TO SUPPORT MEN STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

- Try texting, emailing or calling an anonymous helpline as a first step towards opening up.
- Try to find other men who have experienced similar struggles. This could be male celebrities, joining a peer support community online and talking to like-minded people, or reading about men's mental health stories.
- When men share their feelings or cry, try your best not to make a big deal of it or make jokes that could prevent them opening up again.
- Take time to text, call or chat with the men in your life and ask them how they *really* are.
- Let the men in your life know you are there for them if they need to talk, but give them space without pressure to decide when they are ready to talk.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/men-and-mental-health>

Don't forget, you can contact your 'Ask Your ESS Nutrition and Wellbeing' specialist: [ESS.Wellness@compass-group.co.uk](mailto:ESS.Wellness@compass-group.co.uk)

WELLNESS

# CARING FOR CARERS:

## BUILDING PHYSICAL & MENTAL STRENGTH

VOLUNTEERS WEEK: 1<sup>ST</sup>-7<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026

CARERS WEEK: 9<sup>TH</sup>-15<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026

**Caring for someone you love is one of life's greatest acts of compassion.**

**It can also be physically demanding and emotionally draining.**

Whether you're looking after a partner, parent, friend or child, it's easy to let your own wellbeing slip to the bottom of the list. Research from Carers UK (2023) shows that three-quarters of carers aged 55 and over struggle to stay physically active, often due to time pressures and fatigue.<sup>1</sup> Many also report poor sleep, low energy and signs of burnout. Building strength, both physical and mental, isn't selfish, it's what allows you to keep caring sustainably, while protecting your own health and happiness.

Movement isn't about finding hours for the gym, it's about weaving gentle activity into your daily routine. Regular movement helps maintain muscle strength, improve mood and reduce stress hormones. These benefits are all essential for resilience.

The Carers Active project provides free online exercise sessions, from seated stretches to strength-building workouts, specifically designed for unpaid carers.<sup>1</sup> Programmes such as Carers Walk and Talk in Bristol combine light walking with peer support to boost emotional wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>

Even ten minutes of stretching, chair yoga or mindful walking can make a tangible difference to your strength and stress levels. If lifting or supporting someone is part of your caring role, safe movement and handling courses can reduce injury risk and build confidence.<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to eating, carers often focus on others' meals while neglecting their own. Yet your energy, focus and emotional balance depend heavily on how you nourish your body. Carers UK revealed in their 'Spotlight on Caring and Nutrition' report (2022) that eight in ten carers worry about the diet and hydration of the person they care for, and many also skip meals or rely on convenience foods themselves.<sup>4</sup> Stable blood sugar levels, supported by regular, balanced meals, are key to sustaining mood and energy.

### Nutrition tips for carers:

- Eat *something* every few hours, even a banana or yogurt, between care tasks.
- Choose protein-rich foods (eggs, beans, fish, lean meat) for energy and repair.
- Include magnesium and B vitamins (found in leafy greens, nuts and wholegrains) to support stress resilience.<sup>5</sup>
- Keep hydrated as dehydration increases fatigue and irritability.
- When time allows, batch cook or prepare simple, nutrient-dense meals you can reheat easily.

Caring can be isolating, but connection and support make a huge difference. Burnout develops when constant stress meets limited rest and little support. Preventing it means recognising your needs early and protecting your own boundaries.

- **Talk and share:** Organisations such as Action for Carers (Surrey) run support groups where carers can connect, share experiences and receive emotional support.<sup>6</sup>
- **Seek professional guidance:** The Carers UK Helpline (0808 808 7777) offers advice on finances, respite and wellbeing.<sup>7</sup>
- **Take breaks:** Short pauses during the day, a cup of tea, a walk outside, a deep breath, are not indulgent, they're essential to mental recovery.
- **Rest matters:** Prioritising good sleep strengthens emotional regulation and helps prevent exhaustion.
- **Peer connection:** Online groups such as CarersMind offer safe spaces to discuss mental health and coping tools.<sup>8</sup>

### TIP:

**Set a small, achievable goal, for instance, two short walks a week or a five-minute stretch every morning. Remember, consistency matters more than duration.**

### Remember:

Caring doesn't have to mean doing it all alone. Seeking support is a strength, not a weakness. Small rituals and structure can create a sense of control and calm. Here's a simple weekly self-care schedule to get started:

Day	Movement	Nutrition	Mindful Moment
Mon	10-minute seated stretch	Balanced lunch	5-minute breathing exercise
Weds	20-minute walk	Hydration check	Chat with another carer
Fri	Light yoga or dance	Cook or batch meal	Gratitude journaling
Sun	Gentle outdoor activity	Prep meals for week	Reflect and rest early

Caring is an act of strength, but even the strongest need rest and restoration. By moving a little more, eating well and reaching out for support, you protect your energy and wellbeing for the long term.

If you're struggling emotionally, you can also contact Mind (0300 123 3393) or Samaritans (116 123) for confidential mental health support, because caring well for yourself is part of caring well for others.

# CARING FOR OTHERS, REMEMBERING TO CARE FOR MYSELF



**Jenni Lawson,**  
Operations Director – ESS

Balancing a demanding role with caring responsibilities can feel

like living two parallel lives. As an operations director, I'm used to planning, prioritising and solving problems, but caring for my mum at home and during lockdown, whilst also supporting teenage children, brings a completely different kind of complexity. It's constant, emotional and deeply human.

There's a unique pressure that comes with being the person everyone turns to, both at work and at home. You carry the weight of decisions, the wellbeing of others and the quiet worry about whether you're doing enough. It can be incredibly fulfilling, as you know you only have a certain amount of time left with your elderly parent. This time is precious and you will never get it back.

## Quick Fire Q&A: How I look after my wellbeing

**Q: What helps you manage stress on busy days?**

**A:** I try to take short, mindful pauses: even a five-minute walk between meetings or a few deep breaths before I switch tasks helps reset my focus. I am a great believer in a to-do list to achieve set goals each day.

**Q: What role does nutrition play in your wellbeing?**

**A:** A big one. When life gets hectic, it's easy to skip meals or rely on convenience food, but I notice a huge difference in energy and mood when I eat balanced meals. I am lucky, I have a family who enjoy food. Planning ahead for the week helps to make sure everyone eats well, and that is key.

As a family, we knew how important it was to support each other and how important it is to care for one another.

For many carers, the challenge isn't just physical tiredness: it's the mental load, the invisible juggling act that continues even when you finally sit down. The day might end, but your mind rarely does. I am very fortunate that, as soon as my head hits the pillow, I switch off. Balancing compassion with boundaries and responsibility with rest takes conscious effort.

Over time – being present and in the moment is key. It's about doing what you can, with care and intention and recognising that small moments of recovery matter.

Whether it's taking ten minutes to pause, sharing the load with others or simply being kind to yourself, these moments are what sustain you. I learned to ask for help from friends

and family as you can't do it all yourself. Asking for help and support is not a failure, everyone is always happy to help.

I now support friends who are caring for elderly relatives, supporting them over a cuppa and just listening when it gets hard. Simple acts of kindness can mean so much.

Working in a business that prioritises wellbeing reminds me daily how important it is to care for the carers too. We can only lead and support effectively when we also look after our own health and emotional resilience. Looking after yourself and everyone around you is key.

When caring for my mum, it was not easy and we had our challenges, but we laughed and cried together. I knew how much it meant to her and I hold precious memories of this chapter in our lives together. I look back and remember these days with fondness.

**Q: How do you recharge emotionally?**

**A:** By connecting with people who understand. Sometimes that's colleagues, sometimes friends, sometimes just quiet time to myself. A good book and a long walk always help too.

**Q: What's your top tip for other carers balancing busy lives?**

**A:** Don't feel guilty for looking after yourself. Rest isn't a reward – it's what keeps you going. Even small acts of self-care make a real difference. Don't feel bad asking for help, people want to help you. Laugh, giggle, cry – caring can be a challenge

**Q: What advice would you give to someone who is thinking of becoming a carer?**

**A:** Make sure you include the family in the decision, as it affects everyone. Set boundaries for everyone to follow and don't feel scared to hold family meetings. This was key with my family. We agreed when my mum's illness deteriorated and knew we could no longer provide the best care. We agreed the next step and had a plan in place from the start.

## Nutrition tips for carers:

- Eat *something* every few hours, even a banana or yogurt, between care tasks.
- Choose protein-rich foods (eggs, beans, fish, lean meat) for energy and repair.
- Include magnesium and B vitamins (found in leafy greens, nuts and wholegrains) to support stress resilience.<sup>5</sup>
- Keep hydrated as dehydration increases fatigue and irritability.
- When time allows, batch cook or prepare simple, nutrient-dense meals you can reheat easily.

## Resources and support

- **Carers UK Helpline:** 0808 808 7777, advice, benefits and wellbeing support.<sup>7</sup>
- **Action for Carers Surrey:** 0303 040 1234, local and online support groups.<sup>6</sup>
- **Carers Trust:** Practical resources and wellbeing toolkits for unpaid carers.<sup>9</sup>
- **CarersMind:** Peer support for carers' mental health.<sup>8</sup>
- **Carers Active Hub:** Home exercise and movement sessions for carers.<sup>1</sup>

# PMDD

## THE HIDDEN HORMONAL DISORDER AFFECTING MILLIONS OF PEOPLE

PMDD AWARENESS MONTH: APRIL 2026  
WORLD HEALTH DAY: 7<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2026

For many the premenstrual week can bring irritability, bloating or sadness.  
For a significant minority, symptoms go far beyond ordinary discomfort.



Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) is a severe cyclical hormonal sensitivity condition that affects emotional wellbeing, daily functioning and overall quality of life. Despite being real, measurable and recognised medically, it remains widely underdiagnosed and poorly understood outside specialist care.

PMDD is recognised as a distinct depressive disorder in the DSM-5, characterised by intense emotional and physical symptoms that occur in the luteal phase (usually the one to two weeks before menstruation) and resolve shortly after bleeding starts.<sup>1</sup> This cyclical pattern of symptom onset and resolution, closely tied to the menstrual cycle, is a hallmark of the condition.

While Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) is common, affecting an estimated 30–40% of people who menstruate and causing mild emotional and physical changes, PMDD is much more severe and disabling.<sup>1</sup>

PMDD sufferers experience a cluster of symptoms that can significantly interfere with work, relationships and daily life, including:

- Severe mood swings, irritability or anger
- Anxiety or tension
- Depressed mood, hopelessness or tearfulness
- Fatigue, sleep disruption or appetite changes
- Difficulty concentrating or 'brain fog'
- Physical discomfort such as breast tenderness or headaches.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike common PMS, PMDD requires at least five core symptoms, including at least one mood-related symptom that causes marked distress or impairment.<sup>1</sup>

Recent meta-analytic data estimate that around 1.6% of people who menstruate meet strict diagnostic criteria for PMDD, based on prospective daily symptom ratings. A larger group (up to around 3.2%) meets provisional criteria, where symptoms appear consistent

but haven't been formally confirmed.<sup>2</sup> This translates to millions of people worldwide living with PMDD symptoms at any given time.

Despite this prevalence, PMDD is frequently overlooked or dismissed as 'just hormones' because:

- Symptoms overlap with typical PMS
- Mood changes resemble anxiety or depression
- Limited awareness and training among health professionals.<sup>2</sup>

Better education and screening can help people get accurate diagnoses and support sooner.

For those with PMDD, the emotional and psychological burden is very real and often profound. A 2025 systematic review summarised evidence showing that people with PMDD have significant difficulties with emotion regulation, including heightened emotional reactivity and challenges in identifying and managing emotional states compared with people without PMDD.<sup>3</sup>



# STEP BY STEP

## THE SCIENCE OF WALKING FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Walking is one of the most accessible forms of physical activity and has been extensively studied for its health effects.

Both short and long walks are associated with a wide range of beneficial outcomes for physical and mental health.

Walking acts as a low-intensity aerobic exercise that improves cardiovascular function and overall health. Regular walking has been linked to a lower risk of all-cause mortality and major non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. Faster walking speeds bring even greater benefits.<sup>1,2</sup>

Population studies show that people who increase their daily walking, in duration or intensity, demonstrate improved aerobic fitness, reduced blood pressure and positive changes in body composition. This contributes to lower long-term disease risk.<sup>1</sup>

Even relatively modest step counts (approximately 7,000 steps per day) are associated with significant reductions in the risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, type 2 diabetes, depression and premature death compared with lower step counts.<sup>3</sup>

Walking also has beneficial effects on metabolic and immune function. Evidence from randomised controlled studies shows that walking in natural environments, such as forests or open countryside, enhances immune markers (e.g., salivary immunoglobulin A), while simultaneously reducing stress hormones like cortisol and improving mood more than walking in urban settings.<sup>4</sup>

One of the key benefits of walking is its impact on mental health. Systematic reviews find that walking interventions can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety across diverse adult populations, with effects observed across different walking frequencies, durations and environments.<sup>5</sup> Walking in natural or green environments has been shown to improve mood, reduce negative emotions and rumination, and bolster mental wellbeing more than walking in urban or barren settings.<sup>6</sup> Research indicates that just a single walk in nature can result in lower negative emotions compared with an equivalent walk in an urban space,<sup>7</sup> highlighting the immediate psychological benefits of activity in natural surroundings.

Potential mechanisms behind these mental health benefits include enhanced cerebral blood flow and engagement with restorative environmental stimuli. Research shows that walking in natural settings can influence brain activity patterns associated with attention and emotional regulation, supporting improvements in mood, focus and cognitive engagement.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, these benefits are not limited to long walks. Evidence suggests that short bouts of walking, including daily activity spread throughout the day, can make a meaningful difference to both physical and mental health. Walking breaks also counteract sedentary behaviour and help maintain functional capacity, promoting long-term adherence to an active lifestyle.<sup>1</sup>

Walking enhances physical health by lowering disease risk and improving cardiovascular, metabolic and immune function. It also supports mental health by reducing depression and anxiety symptoms, improving mood and stimulating positive brain responses. These effects are apparent even for short walks and are amplified when walking occurs in natural environments.



1. Systematic review and meta-analysis of the association between usual walking speed and all-cause mortality and risk of major non-communicable diseases. PubMed. (2025). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40266699/>

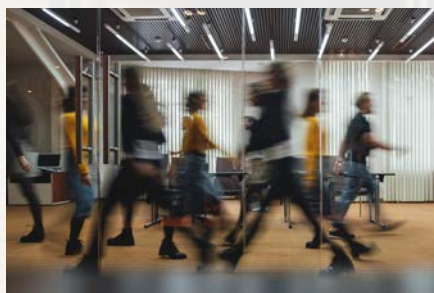
2. Heizmann, A.-N., et al. (2023). Impact of wearable device-based interventions with feedback for increasing daily walking activity and physical capacities in cardiovascular patients: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. BMJ Open. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37433730/>

3. 7,000 steps a day could be enough to improve health, say researchers. The Guardian. (2025).

4. Randomized controlled trial on the efficacy of forest walking compared to urban walking in enhancing mucosal immunity. Scientific Reports. (2024/2025).

## Everyday movement that counts

<b>ACTIVE COMMUTING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Walking to work (even part of the journey)</li> <li>● Getting off the bus one stop early</li> <li>● Walking from the car park rather than searching for the closest space</li> <li>● School runs on foot</li> </ul>	<p>Adding even 5–10 minutes at each end of the day builds substantial weekly activity.</p>
<b>WALKING AT WORK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Walking to a colleague instead of emailing</li> <li>● Taking calls while walking</li> <li>● Walking meetings</li> <li>● Using the stairs instead of the lift</li> <li>● Walking during lunch breaks</li> </ul>	<p>Stair climbing in particular increases heart rate quickly and strengthens lower body muscles, making it an efficient cardiovascular boost.</p>
<b>DOMESTIC WALKING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Moving around the house while cleaning</li> <li>● Carrying laundry upstairs</li> <li>● Tidying, gardening or mowing the lawn</li> <li>● Pacing while thinking or planning</li> </ul>	<p>These activities are often classified as light-to-moderate intensity physical activity, especially when sustained.</p>
<b>ERRANDS AND DAILY TASKS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Walking to local shops</li> <li>● Collecting prescriptions</li> <li>● Walking children to activities</li> <li>● Walking the dog</li> <li>● Visiting neighbours</li> </ul>	<p>Purposeful walking often feels easier to maintain than ‘exercise for exercise’s sake.’</p>
<b>MICRO-WALKS (SHORT BOUTS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 5–10 minute breaks from desk work</li> <li>● Walking while waiting for food to cook</li> <li>● A quick loop around the block after dinner</li> <li>● Walking during children’s sports practice</li> </ul>	<p>Research increasingly shows that short bouts accumulated across the day contribute to cardiovascular and metabolic benefits.</p>
<b>STRUCTURED BUT SHORT WALKS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 10-minute brisk walk after meals (particularly helpful for blood glucose regulation)</li> <li>● Evening decompression walk</li> <li>● Walking in green spaces</li> <li>● Weekend family stroll</li> </ul>	



### What makes it count?

#### Walking generally counts as beneficial physical activity if it:

- Raises your heart rate slightly
- Makes you breathe a little faster
- Feels purposeful and sustained (even 5–10 minutes)

Brisk walking (where you can talk but not sing) provides greater cardiovascular benefit, but gentle walking still supports mobility, mood and circulation.

### How much is enough?

- Around **7,000–8,000** steps per day is associated with substantial health benefits
- Even **3,000–4,000** steps above your baseline can make a difference
- Small, consistent additions are more important than occasional long walks

5. The Effect of Walking on Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *PMC*. (2025). <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11267235/>

6. City walk or nature walk? Evidence-based psychological and physiological outcomes – A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*. (2025).

7. Watkins-Martin, K., et al. (2022). The effects of walking in nature on negative and positive affect in adult psychiatric outpatients with major depressive disorder. *Journal of Affective Disorders*.

8. McDonnell, A. S., & Strayer, D. L. (2024). The influence of a walk in nature on human resting brain activity. *Scientific Reports*.

# WALKING

## THE SURPRISINGLY SIMPLE RESET BUTTON



**Steve Holmes,**  
People Partner – ESS  
Energy, Government &  
Infrastructure

For many of us, the working day is a blur of meetings, appointments, Teams calls... and trying to remember where we last left our cup of tea.



That's certainly true in my world!

In my role, I travel between multiple sites across Central London. I always try to walk between sites instead of squeezing onto the Tube. There's something grounding about stepping out into the city and letting your mind clear. It gives you a moment to transition between one task and the next, turning what could be just another commute into a tiny pocket of breathing space, a moving reset button.

The same applies when working from home. Living right next to Woodbank Park in Stockport gives me the perfect excuse to escape at lunchtime. My dog, Chip, is always eager to drag me away from the PC, especially after a morning glued to Teams.

Ten minutes of fresh air does more for my head than any productivity hack ever could. It isn't about chasing 10,000 steps or proving anything on a fitness tracker. Sometimes the biggest

mental boost comes from the smallest stroll, the kind that pulls you out of your bubble, resets your focus, and sets you up for the rest of the day.

Walking isn't just a solo wellbeing tool. Getting out with my family at the weekend has become one of the easiest ways for us to connect. Away from screens and distractions, we end up having the conversations that never seem to happen otherwise. Side-by-side, wandering and talking about nothing and everything does wonders for our family dynamic.

This time together does far more than stretch your legs; it lifts your head, lightens your mind and creates space for genuine moments together. In a world that moves fast, walking slows things down just enough to help you feel human again.



# UPCOMING WELLNESS WEBINARS



Looking to increase your nutrition and wellbeing knowledge?

Attending our wellness webinars can help improve your knowledge and awareness of lots of different health and wellbeing topics. Previous topics covered include mindfulness, heart health and healthy eating as we get older.

Please join us for the below webinars coming up over the next few months:

## FIBRE & DIGESTIVE HEALTH

Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> APRIL: 2pm – 2.30pm



## STOP FOOD WASTE DAY

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> APRIL: 2pm – 2.30pm



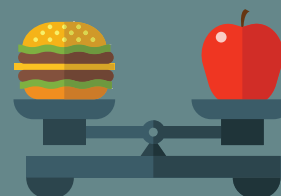
## MEDITATION

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> MAY: 2pm – 2.30pm



## PORTION CONTROL & WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> JUNE: 2pm – 2.30pm



Scan the QR code or send us an email at [ess.wellness@compass-group.co.uk](mailto:ess.wellness@compass-group.co.uk) if you wish to get the links to the webinar directly in your inbox each month.



If you've missed any of our webinars and want to watch them back, check out our YouTube channel @WeAreESS.

# SMALL CHANGES BIG IMPACT

## EVERYDAY HABITS THAT HELP MANAGE BLOOD SUGAR

DIABETES WEEK: 10<sup>TH</sup>–16<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026

BNF HEALTHY EATING WEEK: 9<sup>TH</sup>–13<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026

Diabetes affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide, yet it isn't a single condition.

Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition where the body no longer produces insulin and requires lifelong medical management. Type 2 diabetes, which is far more common, develops when the body becomes less responsive to insulin and blood sugar levels rise over time.

While type 2 diabetes has genetic influences, research shows it can be positively supported through everyday lifestyle habits, particularly balanced nutrition, regular movement and stress management. Small, science-supported changes to what and how we eat can help improve blood sugar control, energy levels and long-term wellbeing.

Whether you're living with diabetes, at risk or simply want to better understand your body's relationship with glucose, this article explores evidence-based insights to help you feel informed, supported and empowered.

Food is more than fuel; it's a tool to stabilise blood sugar. Choosing balanced meals with starchy carbohydrates, lean protein, healthy fats and fibre can help smooth the rise in blood glucose after eating.



This reduces the spikes associated with insulin resistance and long-term complications.<sup>1,2</sup>

Eating more high-fibre foods, such as beans, lentils, whole grains like quinoa and brown rice, and plenty of colourful vegetables, helps slow digestion and supports gut health. In turn, this can improve glucose handling and insulin sensitivity.<sup>4</sup>

Research shows that low glycaemic index (GI) and low glycaemic load dietary patterns lead to better long-term HbA1c control (a key marker of average blood glucose) and lower fasting glucose compared with higher GI diets.<sup>4</sup>

### Low-GI food examples

(Slower energy release, steadier blood sugar)

- Porridge oats
- Wholegrain pasta
- Basmati rice
- Lentils or chickpeas
- Apples or berries

### High-GI food examples

(Faster digestion, quicker blood sugar rise)

- White bread
- White rice
- Mashed potato
- Cornflakes
- Cakes or biscuits



1. Diabetes UK. Glycaemic index and diabetes – low GI foods help manage long term glucose levels and reduce risk of complications.

2. Hanick, C.J. et al. (2025). Wholefood, food, food, plantbased intensive based intensive lifestyle intervention improves glycaemic control in type 2 diabetes. *Diabetologia*.

3. Nutrition & Metabolism (2025). Effects of nutritional interventions on T2DM outcomes: network meta analysis – supporting dietary impacts on glycaemic control.

4. BMJ meta analysis (2024). Low GI/GL dietary patterns improve HbA1c and metabolic risk factors.

5. Verywell Health (2026). Walking after meals helps lower blood sugar, even for short durations.

Portion control matters too. Even healthy carbohydrates can raise blood sugar if eaten in large amounts at once. Spreading them evenly throughout the day and being mindful of overall portions supports steadier glucose levels and helps prevent energy crashes.

You don't need intense workouts to improve glucose control. Walking after meals, even for 10–20 minutes, helps muscles use glucose for energy and can significantly lower post-meal blood sugar levels.<sup>5,6</sup>

Research suggests that starting your walk soon after eating (ideally within the first 30 minutes) maximises this benefit without causing digestive discomfort.<sup>5</sup> Regular post-meal movement doesn't just support blood sugar; it also contributes to weight

management, heart health and overall metabolic wellbeing, and it is something most people can fit into daily routines.

Staying well hydrated helps your body transport glucose into cells and supports kidney function. Chronic dehydration may be associated with higher blood sugar readings. Drinking water regularly throughout the day, aiming for between six to eight glasses, is a simple habit that supports metabolic health.<sup>6</sup>

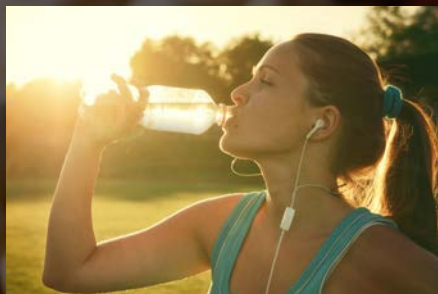
Stress also impacts glucose control through hormonal pathways. Cortisol, the 'stress hormone,' can prompt the liver to release glucose and make insulin less effective. Practices that reduce stress, such as deep breathing, mindfulness, gentle yoga or simply time outdoors, support emotional wellbeing and glucose management.

There's growing understanding of how the gut microbiome and nutrition together influence glucose metabolism and insulin sensitivity.

Diets rich in whole foods, especially fibre from legumes, vegetables and whole grains, support beneficial gut bacteria that produce short-chain fatty acids, which improve insulin signalling and reduce inflammation.<sup>8,9</sup>

Choosing low-GI foods slows carbohydrate absorption, decreasing rapid glucose spikes after meals and easing the demand on insulin. This can improve long-term glucose control and reduce cardiometabolic risk factors, including LDL cholesterol and triglycerides.<sup>4</sup>

Mindful eating (paying attention to hunger cues, chewing thoroughly and slowing down) supports better digestion. It also helps you become more attuned to what your body needs, often resulting in more balanced eating and reduced overeating.<sup>10</sup>



## Understanding type 1 vs type 2 diabetes: what everyone should know

Many people use the term 'diabetes' without realising there are key differences between types. Understanding these can guide how you approach management and prevention.

**Type 1 diabetes** is an autoimmune condition in which the body's immune system attacks insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. People with type 1 cannot produce enough insulin and rely on insulin therapy to survive. Genetic factors play a strong role, and lifestyle alone does not prevent it.

**Type 2 diabetes**, by contrast, largely develops when the body's cells become resistant to insulin or the pancreas cannot produce enough to compensate. Genetics and age matter, but **lifestyle factors like diet, activity and weight** are major contributors to risk. Around **90% of people with diabetes have type 2**, and a growing body of evidence supports lifestyle interventions (diet, movement, behavioural support) as a cornerstone of management and prevention.<sup>6</sup> Programmes such as England's Healthier You initiative increase access to personalised support for people at risk, helping them lose weight and adopt healthier habits before a diabetes diagnosis.<sup>7</sup>

**HEALTHIER YOU**

NHS DIABETES PREVENTION PROGRAMME

## Everyday habits that help:

A practical daily toolkit based on current evidence:

- **Balance each plate** with protein, fibre, healthy fats and colourful plants.
- **Choose low-GI and high-fibre carbohydrates** like legumes, quinoa and non-starchy vegetables.<sup>4</sup>
- **Control portions** and spread carbohydrates across meals.
- **Walk after eating**, even a 10–20 minute stroll helps regulate blood sugar.<sup>5,6</sup>
- **Stay hydrated** throughout the day.
- **Manage stress** through mindful practices, breathwork or gentle activity.
- **Monitor patterns**, not just numbers. Find routines that help you stay consistent.

Supporting blood sugar health doesn't always require dramatic change. Start with one practical step. Build from there. Over time, small, consistent habits can reshape how your body manages glucose, creating steadier energy, better resilience and lasting wellbeing.

6. Indian Times lifestyle piece (2025). Post meal walks and simple lifestyle changes help control glucose spikes.

7. NHS England report (2025). Healthier You Programme expands lifestyle support to reduce type 2 diabetes risk.

8. Springer Nature (2025). Nutrition and gut mechanisms linking fibre, insulin sensitivity and metabolic health.

9. Zhao, L. (2019). The gut microbiota and obesity: from correlation to causality. *Nature Reviews Microbiology*, 17, 639–652.

10. Andriani R, Kamila A, Putri RA, et al (2024). The effect of mindful eating on dietary behaviour and fasting blood glucose in type 2 diabetes mellitus patients. *Healthcare in Low-Resource Settings*.

# RESCUE YOUR ROOTS

## GIVING VEG A SECOND CHANCE

STOP FOOD WASTE DAY: 29<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2026  
THE GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK: 6<sup>TH</sup>–14<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026

The environmental and financial impacts of food waste.



In the UK, the need is clear: households generate around 70% of the nation's food waste, contributing to the 9.5–9.6 million tonnes of food wasted annually, much of which was still edible when thrown away.<sup>1</sup>

**33% of all food produced globally is lost or wasted every year.<sup>2</sup>**

One of the most accessible ways to reduce our food waste is meal planning. By mapping out meals for the week and buying only what we need, we can dramatically cut the volume of food that spoils before it's used. Learning the difference between 'use by' and 'best before' on food labels also helps reduce the amount of unnecessary waste of perfectly safe food.

Proper food storage extends the life of fresh produce and leftovers. Using airtight containers and organising your fridge effectively can make a real difference. Even small habits, like bringing older food items to the front of the fridge, can significantly reduce waste.

Creative cooking is another powerful tool. Transforming leftover vegetables into soups or curries, overripe fruit into smoothies or stale bread into breadcrumbs makes eating sustainably both enjoyable and nutritious.

The amount of edible food and drink the UK wasted in 2022 would fill eight Wembley Stadiums (4.4 million tonnes).<sup>1</sup>

Coming together as a community helps to raise awareness of climate and nature. Whether it's at school or with local groups, you can take part in activities such as food-sharing events, repair cafes, community planting and sustainability workshops. Sharing ideas and resources with one another is an achievable way we can all contribute to a greener future while strengthening community wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

**8% of all greenhouse gas emissions each year are due to food loss and waste.<sup>2</sup>**

Food waste contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions but also impacts personal wellbeing. The average UK household loses about £470 a year to food that ends up in the bin, often due to confusion over date labels, poor storage or buying more than needed.<sup>4</sup> Cutting waste helps protect the planet while supporting healthier eating, reducing stress and easing financial pressure.

Tackling food waste can seem overwhelming. However, by taking small, meaningful actions at home we can carry that momentum into wider community involvement.

## Feel-good ways to cut food waste

- **Plan with purpose:** Before shopping, write a simple meal plan and list. Buying only what you need helps prevent impulse purchases and ensures ingredients are used in time.
- **Understand date labels:** Learning the difference between use by (food safety) and best before (quality) prevents safe, edible food from being thrown away unnecessarily.
- **Store food smartly:** Organising your fridge using airtight containers, freezing leftovers and rotating older items to the front can dramatically extend the life of your food.
- **Get creative with leftovers:** Transform extra vegetables into soups, leftover rice into stir-fried rice or ripe fruit into smoothies.
- **Share the surplus:** Donate usable food such as dried, tinned or long-life products to community fridges or food banks. These small actions can help to strengthen communities and reduce waste.
- **Try composting:** Turning scraps such as peelings and coffee grounds into compost helps reduce landfill waste while enriching soil for gardens and green spaces.

By embracing even one or two of these changes, you can make a meaningful difference, reducing your environmental footprint while feeling more connected, empowered and resourceful.

# VEGETABLE PEEL CRISPS

An easy, zero waste recipe we can all try at home.

## Ingredients:

- 1 bowl of washed veg peelings (carrot, potato, parsnip, beetroot, sweet potato, etc.)
- 1–2 tbsp olive oil
- Salt
- Optional extras: black pepper, paprika, garlic powder, chilli flakes, mixed herbs

## Method:

- 1 Wash your peelings thoroughly so they are clean and free from dirt. Pat them dry with a tea towel—dry peelings crisp better.
- 2 Place the peelings in a bowl. Add olive oil, salt and any seasonings you like. Toss to coat evenly.
- 3 Spread the peelings in a single layer on a baking tray. Bake at 180°C (160°C fan) for 8–12 minutes, turning halfway. Keep an eye on them—thin peelings crisp very quickly!
- 4 Let them cool for 5 minutes—they get crispier as they cool. Enjoy!

Serve as a snack, sprinkle over soups and salads, or keep in an airtight container for a day or two.

## Tips to reduce waste even further

- Mix peelings from different veggies for colourful crisps.
- Use leftover dips, sauces or yoghurt-based dressings to serve.
- Save any soft peelings for vegetable stock instead of throwing away.

1. <https://www.wrap.ngo/sites/default/files/2025-06/WRAP-UK-Food-Waste-and-Food-Surplus-Key-Facts-July-2025-v5.pdf>

2. <https://www.stopfoodwasteday.com/en/index.html>

3. <https://www.greatbiggreenweek.com/>

4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-39747327>

# WHY CLIMATE ACTION IS ALSO ABOUT HEALTH, FAIRNESS AND EVERYDAY WELLBEING

COMMUNITY GARDEN WEEK: 1<sup>ST</sup>–7<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2026  
 THE GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK: 6<sup>TH</sup>–14<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026  
 CLEAN AIR DAY: 19<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026

When we talk about climate action, it's often framed as something distant - melting ice caps, future generations and global targets all spring to mind.



The reality is much closer to home, shaping the air we breathe, the food we eat and the places we live. The choices we make to protect the planet also shape our health and our communities. They affect our cost of living and quality of life right now. Climate action isn't just about the environment; it's about people.

Actions that reduce environmental harm also improve physical and mental health. Air pollution is a leading risk worldwide, contributing to heart and lung disease and premature death.<sup>1</sup> Reducing emissions improves air quality and helps people stay healthier.<sup>2</sup>

Many everyday habits that support the environment also benefit health. Spending time in green spaces is strongly associated with reduced stress, improved mental wellbeing and lower risk of chronic disease.<sup>3</sup> Eating more plant-based and less ultra-processed food not only helps the planet by reducing food system emissions but also improves heart and metabolic health.<sup>4</sup>

## Examples of simple, everyday habits that support both planetary and personal health include:

- Walking or cycling instead of short car journeys.
- Spending lunch breaks or weekends in parks or other green spaces.
- Growing herbs or vegetables at home or in community gardens.
- Choosing more plant-based meals during the week.
- Swapping ultra-processed snacks for whole foods such as fruit, nuts and legumes.
- Planning meals to reduce food waste.
- Buying seasonal and locally sourced produce where possible.
- Cooking at home more often rather than relying on processed convenience foods.

These small, repeatable behaviours can create meaningful cumulative benefits for both individual wellbeing and environmental sustainability.

1. World Health Organization (2023). Air pollution and health. WHO.  
 2. World Health Organization (2021). WHO global air quality guidelines. WHO.

3. World Health Organization (2021). Green and blue spaces and mental health. WHO Regional Office for Europe.  
 4. Willett, W. et al. (2019). Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet*, 393(10170), 447–492.

5. WRAP (2023). Household food waste: UK key facts. Waste & Resources Action Programme.  
 6. UK Health Security Agency (2023). Health effects of climate change in the UK.



Climate-friendly behaviours often reduce household costs. In the UK, households lose hundreds of pounds each year through avoidable food waste.<sup>5</sup> Simple efficiency improvements can lower energy bills and reduce fuel poverty.<sup>6</sup> Healthier, lower-emission diets can be affordable and, in some contexts, cheaper than current diets,<sup>7</sup> benefiting both your finances and your nutrition.

**Many simple climate-friendly behaviours can help save money, for example:**

- Planning meals to avoid food waste.
- Choosing seasonal, locally grown produce.
- Switching to energy-efficient appliances or LED lighting.
- Lowering the thermostat by one or two degrees to reduce heating bills.
- Reducing single-use plastics and packaging through less frequent purchasing.



The transition to a low-carbon economy creates jobs in sustainable food systems, renewable energy, conservation and community services.<sup>8</sup> These include running community gardens, local recycling projects, building solar panels or restoring woodlands. Supporting local procurement and social enterprise investment strengthens regional economies and builds social cohesion. Community-led climate initiatives, like neighbourhood clean-ups or tree-planting days, can also boost wellbeing, social connection and sense of purpose.<sup>9</sup>

Nature underpins human health. Biodiverse ecosystems provide food security, clean water and resilience to climate extremes.<sup>10</sup> Protecting biodiversity is therefore both an environmental and public health priority.



Environmental pollution disproportionately affects children, older adults and deprived communities.<sup>11</sup> The health benefits of cleaner air alone can outweigh the costs of climate action.<sup>12</sup> Taking small actions today can create a healthier, fairer future for everyone.

Climate action is not about sacrifice. It is about designing systems where healthier, fairer and more sustainable choices become the default. Taking action for the planet simultaneously protects health, supports communities and improves quality of life now and for future generations.

7. Springmann, M. et al. (2021). Health and nutritional aspects of sustainable diet strategies. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 5(7), e479–e488.

8. International Labour Organization (2023). *World Employment and Social Outlook: The role of a just transition*.

9. Public Health England (2020). *Improving health and wellbeing through community-centred approaches*.

10. IPBES (2022). *The methodological assessment report on the diverse values and valuation of nature*.

11. UNICEF (2021). *The toxic truth: Children's exposure to air pollution*.

12. Watts, N. et al. (2023). The 2023 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change. *The Lancet*, 402(10419), 2346–2394.

# REFILL, REDUCE, REFRESH:

## HOW CUTTING SINGLE-USE PLASTIC SUPPORTS YOUR WELLNESS

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY: 5<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026  
NATIONAL REFILL DAY: 19<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026

Wellness is often framed around nutrition, sleep and movement, yet increasingly it is shaped by something broader: the daily choices we make and how aligned they are with our values.

A bottle costing £1–£2 may seem insignificant, but purchasing just three per week could amount to £150–£300 annually.



One of the simplest, and most powerful, of those choices is reducing single-use plastic, particularly bottled water. Choosing to refill rather than rebuy is not just an environmental gesture; it is a decision that supports psychological, financial and cognitive wellbeing.

Globally, around one million plastic bottles are purchased every minute.<sup>1</sup> While recycling rates have improved in some countries, large volumes of plastic still end up in landfill, incineration or the natural environment. Beyond visible waste, plastic production itself is resource-intensive and closely tied to fossil fuel use, contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>2</sup> Each bottle carries an environmental footprint long before it is opened. Shifting from single-use to refillable options reduces demand at source and supports broader sustainability efforts.

The impact of this shift is not only environmental. Financial wellbeing is a recognised pillar of overall health, and bottled water represents one of the easiest areas where savings accumulate quickly. A bottle costing £1–£2 may seem insignificant, but purchasing just three per week could amount to £150–£300 annually. In contrast, UK tap water costs less than 1p per litre on average.<sup>3</sup> A reusable bottle quickly pays for itself. Research from the UK Financial Wellbeing Survey indicates that consistent, small savings behaviours contribute to a greater sense of financial control and confidence.<sup>4</sup> Seeing tangible evidence that daily choices produce real savings can reduce financial stress and boost feelings of agency.

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There is also a psychological dimension to sustainable behaviour. Studies suggest that engaging in pro-environmental actions is linked with higher life satisfaction and a stronger sense of purpose.<sup>5,6</sup> This is partly explained by the concept of self-concordance, the idea that wellbeing improves when our actions align with our personal values and identity.<sup>7</sup>

Carrying and using a refillable bottle may appear minor, but it reinforces identity: "I am someone who acts consciously." In a time when climate concerns can feel overwhelming, small constructive behaviours can reduce eco-anxiety by transforming concern into practical contribution.

Reducing single-use plastic can also simplify daily routines. Physical disorder and clutter have been linked to increased cognitive load and reduced self-regulation.<sup>8,9</sup>

Disposable culture often creates small but constant streams of waste: empty bottles in cars, bags, desks and bins. Replacing these with a single reusable item reduces purchasing decisions, waste management and environmental clutter. Behavioural science shows that habits are more likely to stick when they are simple and friction-free.<sup>10</sup> Once refilling becomes automatic, it removes decision fatigue rather than adding to it.

Importantly, reducing single-use plastic is not about perfection. Individual actions alone will not resolve global environmental challenges. However, wellbeing is rarely the result of dramatic change; it is built on consistent, intentional behaviours that reinforce who we want to be. Choosing to refill supports environmental sustainability, strengthens financial resilience, enhances personal agency and reduces everyday waste. It is a small act with layered returns.

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# SPRING IS FINALLY PEEPING AROUND THE CORNER

Greetings from the ESS Market Garden at the Defence Academy.



**Janet Thomas**  
Head Gardener - ESS

The days are definitely getting longer, and the spring bulbs are starting to add some much-needed colour to the borders and verges. My excitement for the growing season ahead is mounting.

We have already started seed sowing, and the greenhouse is filling up with early summer crops. As usual, I started the chillis, peppers and aubergines off with heat, as they often need a good long growing season, especially if the summer isn't the warmest. Seed onions, spring onions, radish, mangetout and herbs are also on the go, and by the time you are reading this, I expect most other crops, like the summer tomatoes, cucumbers and courgettes, will be in too.

## Community Garden Week

You may not have heard about it, but there is a Community Garden week in the UK. This year, it runs from 31st March to 6th April. Community Garden Week is an annual celebration of community and school gardens, promoting the benefits of shared green spaces for community cohesion, mental wellbeing, and local, sustainable food production.



While the market garden isn't technically a community garden, when I think about it, it really does tick a lot of the boxes that community gardens are set up for.

Luly and I were chatting about the garden only the other day, reflecting on how proud we both are of what we have achieved in creating the Market Garden and what a wonderful place it is to work.

We are often reminded of this by the plethora of visitors we get throughout the year, all full of admiration and compliments about the beautiful and productive space it has become.

Many people visit us, some are working on the camp and just coming for a lunchtime stroll, enjoying the fresh air and peace. Lots are gardening or beekeeping enthusiasts who have heard about what we are doing and want to find out more, often asking if they can lend a hand. I already have a few telephone numbers stored of willing volunteers for the year ahead.

We also get to speak to a number of people from the local community who walk along the path around the golf course at the other side of the perimeter fence. There are plenty of regulars who always stop to ask about the project, see what we are growing and comment on the produce they can spot. We are very lucky that the garden's location allows both the local community and those on camp to see the work we are doing.

ESS and the MOD also bring lots of visitors to the garden. Most of them have been really enthusiastic about learning what we do, and the keen gardeners often leave with a few hints and tips. I like to think that we've inspired some people to give growing produce a go.



Last year, we hosted the local Girl Guides for a few hours. They learned about gardening and sustainable growing, and left with some fresh salad and raspberries to take back to their camp for supper. The language school on camp have visited us several times over the years. They get to have a slightly offbeat lesson: I talk about what we do, and they have to translate as part of their learning.

Not only are we proud of what we've achieved, but I've also realised that we actually have our own wonderful little garden community. Though small in size, our green space is abundant with life and activity, bringing people together through the love of growing, beekeeping, social connection or simply the enjoyment of being outdoors.

If you want to find out about community gardens in your area, there is plenty of information online. The Royal Horticultural Society also have information on their website. Why not give it a go? Spring is the perfect time of year to get started.

Keep on growing, and 'bee' happy outside!

Janet

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**Leanne King**  
BSc (Hons), PGCE, RNutr  
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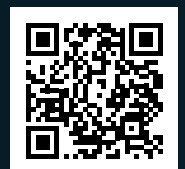


**Lottie Jones**  
BSc (Hons), MSc, RNutr  
ESS Nutrition and  
Wellbeing Officer

If you have any queries, email and ask your ESS Nutrition and Wellbeing specialist  
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